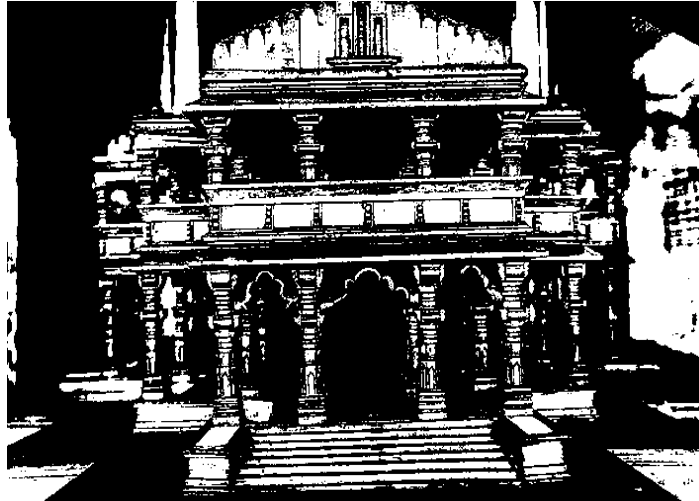


AYODHYA in ITS ARCHITECTURE Myth and Reality



Srishti Dokras

*B. Arch. (Bachelor of Architecture), IDEAS- Institute for Design Education and Architectural Studies
Visiting Scholar to Melbourne, Australia
Currently working on REVIT software for Base 4, Nagpur*

*aapadaam apahartaaram daataaram sarvasaMpadaam.h /
lokaabhiraamam shriiraamam bhuuyo bhuuyo namaamyaham.h //*
*"I bow again and again to Sri Rama Who removes (all) obstacles, grants all wealth and pleases
all." RAMAYANA*

The value of a built environment, therefore, is a conglomerate of its actual physical existence and the historical memories and myths people attach to it, bring to it, and project on it.—Oliver, P

Ayodhyā (Hindi: अयोध्या) is an ancient city of India, the old capital of Awadh, in the current Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh. Ayodhya is the birth place of Hindu God Shri Ram, and the capital of Kosala Kingdom. This Hindu holy city is described as early as in the Hindu Epics. During the time of Gautama Buddha the city was called Ayojjhā (Pali). Under Muslim rule, it was the seat of the governor of Awadh, and later during the British Raj the city was known as Ajodhya or Ajodhia and was part of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, it was also the seat of a small 'talukdari' state. It is on the right bank of the river Sarayu, 555 km east of New Delhi. The word Ayodhya is Sanskrit for "not to be warred against". Some Puranas like the Brahmanda Purana consider Ayodhya as one of the six holiest cities in Hinduism.

INTRODUCTION: To write about the architecture of Ayodhya is fraught with many difficulties therefore I have invoked Lord Ram in the opening shloka of Ramayana to remove these obstacles and make my journey lighter. The problem is distinguishing between the Myth and the reality of Ayodhya. Ayodhya no longer exists as it was then. The architecture of the city is one that is contemporary. Even the infamous Ram Temple is from the 15 Th Century though the birthplace of Ram, as such, could be the eternal myth. So why talk about the architecture of the city?

“We may bury time capsules to share information with the future, but the ruins of our cities will also speak volumes to them about our way of life. From architecture and art to politics and technology - when the archaeologists of the future excavate the ruins of New York City two thousand years from now, what might they expect to find? Skyscrapers of steel and glass. Museums full of artwork. Lots of malls. All of these artifacts we leave behind will teach those future excavators about what was important to us.”¹

The Temple city of Ayodhya:

The ancient city of Ayodhya was (considered to be) one of the most ancient, largest and most magnificent of Indian cities and the holiest of the world. Skand and some other Puranas rank Ayodhya as one of the seven most sacred cities of India. It was the venue of many an event in Hindu history, today preeminently a temple town. This city was also a significant trade center in 600 BC. The word "Ayodhya" is a regularly formed derivation of the Sanskrit verb *yudh*, "to fight, to wage war". *Yodhya* is the future passive participle, meaning "to be fought"; the initial *a* is the negative prefix; the whole therefore means "not to be fought" or, more idiomatically in English, "invincible". This meaning is attested by the *Atharvaveda*, which uses it to refer to the unconquerable city of gods. The 9th century Jain poem *Adi Purana* also states that Ayodhya "does not exist by name alone but by the merit" of being unconquerable by enemies. *Satyopakhyaana* interprets the word slightly differently, stating that it means "that which cannot be conquered by sins" (instead of enemies).

The capital of Dasaratha was Ayodhya. Ayodhya means a city into which enemies cannot enter. According to the Ramayana, Ayodhya was founded by Manu, the law-giver of the Hindus. For centuries it was the capital of the descendants of the Surya dynasty, of which Lord Rama was the most celebrated king. Based on the records, it is said to have covered an area of 250 km² (96 square miles), and was the capital of the Hindu kingdom of Kosala (Kaushal), the court of the great king Dasaratha, the 63rd monarch of the solar line. The opening chapters of the Ramayana recount the magnificence of the city, the glories of the monarch and the virtues, wealth and loyalty of his people. Dasaratha was the father of Rama, the seventh avatar of the Vishnu. It is here that Shri Rama was born. Ayodhya during ancient times was known as Kosaldesa. The Atharvaveda describes it as "a city built by Gods and being as prosperous as paradise itself". The illustrious ruling dynasties of this region were the Ikshvakus of the Suryavamsha (solar clan). According to tradition, Ikshvaku was the eldest son of Vaivasvata Manu, who established himself at Ayodhya. The earth is said to have its name 'Prithivi' from Prithu, the 6th king of the line. A few generations later came Mandhatri, in whose line the 31st king was Harischandra, known widely for his love of Truth. Raja Sagar of the same line performed the Asvamedha Yajna and his great grandson Bhagiratha is reputed to have brought Ganga on earth by virtue of his penances.

Later in the time this clan came to be called as Raghuvamsha. Bhagirathi's Grandson was Raja Dasaratha, the illustrious father of Lord Rama, with whom the glory of the Kosala dynasty reached its peak. The story of this epic has been immortalized by Valmiki and immensely popularized by the great masses through centuries. According to puranic tradition, in the 93rd generation from Ikshvaku, the 30th from Rama was Brihabdala the last famous king of the Ikshvaku dynasty of Ayodhya, who was killed during the Mahabharata war.

Muktistalams : Description Ayodhya is considered to be one of the 7 Muktistalams of India. Ayodhya is believed to be a component of Vaikuntham, given to Manu by Vishnu, and installed on the banks of the Sarayu. Ayodhya is very closely associated with the story of Rama (as told in the timeless Indian epic Ramayana). The Tamil Alvars have mentioned Ayodhya in their works; Nammalwar, Tirumangaialwar and Tondaradippodialwar in one poem each; while Periyalwar and Kulasekharalwar have six and four poems each, mentioning Ayodhya. The Ramayana dates way back in time. The Alvars lived in the latter half of the first millenium CE.

The Ammaji Temple is a temple built embracing South Indian architecture, at a much later date, at Ayodhya, on the banks of the Sarayu river. Ranganathar and Rama are enshrined here. Rama is enshrined in a seated posture facing North. Worship services are conducted here by South Indian Sree Vaishnava priests. There are several temples and shrines related to Rama Sita Lakshmana and Hanuman in the ancient town of Ayodhya.

Historical Significance

Tulsidas is said to have begun the writing of his famous Ramayana poem Shri Ramacharitamanas in Ayodhya in 1574 CE. Several Tamil Alwar mention the city of Ayodhya. Ayodhya is also said to be the birthplace of King Bharata (The First Chakravarti King), Bhahubali, Brahmi, Sundari, King Dasaratha, Acharya Padaliptasurisvarji, King Harishchandra, Shri Rama Achalbhrata, and the ninth Gandhara of Mahavir Swami. Ancient texts talk but little of Ayodhya let alone underline any significant Architectural perspective:

Verse Locator for Book II : Ayodhya Kanda - Book Of Ayodhya :Chapter 5

*bR^indabR^indairayodhyaayaM raajamaargaaH samantataH /
babhuuvurabhisaMbaadhaaH kutuuhalajanairvR^itaaH || 2-5-16*

All the royal highways in the city of Ayodhya were filled with groups and groups of delighted people and became congested.

*siktasaMmR^ishhTarathyaa hi tadaharvanamaalinii /
aasiidayodhyaa nagarii samuchchhritagR^ihadhvajaa || 2-5-18*

On that day, in the city of Ayodhya, all the roads were cleaned and sprinkled with water. There were rows of trees on both sides of the roads and flags hoisted on houses.

References such as those above do not put a finger on any design concept available. Ayodhya is also the birth place of five Tirthankars, including the first Tirthankar of Jainism, Shri Rishabh Dev. He is known as the father of Jain religion. The city is also important in the history and heritage of Buddhism in India, with several Buddhist temples, monuments and centers of learning having been established here during the age of the Mauryan Empire and the Gupta Dynasty. Ayodhya reached its glorious peak as known to history during the reign of the Guptas over India.

According to an 11th century Korean chronicle the Samguk Yusa, the wife of King Suro of the ancient Korean kingdom of Geumgwan Gaya was a princess who traveled by boat from a faraway land called Ayuta to Korea in 48 CE. It is commonly thought that Ayodhya is the foreign land referred to in the Korean chronicles, but some scholars believe that the foreign land may have been Ayutthaya of Thailand. The Koreans know the princess as Heo Hwang-ok, who was the first queen of Geumgwan Gaya and is considered an ancestor by several Korean lineages. According to Korean legends, Ayodhyian princess Suriratna travelled to South Korea when she was 16. She was sent to Korea by her father, the king of Ayodhya who received a divine command in his dream to do so. Suriratna undertook the voyage accompanied by her brother, a prince of Ayodhya.

This incident, Korean researcher claimed to have taken place in 48 AD. She was received by King Kim-Suro upon arrival. The two married and founded the Karak dynasty. The king was so fond of her that he built a temple at the place where they met first. Suriratna's story is described in ancient Korean text, Samgyuk Yusa - also known as Samgyuk Saki - meaning the memoirs of three kingdoms. Suriratna or Heo Hwang-ok is said to have lived till 189 years. Upon her death, a tomb was built in Kimhae. There is a stone pagoda in front of the tomb of the queen. South Koreans believe that the pagoda has the stone which she had carried from Ayodhya in her boat. Can we say then that the Korean architecture of today is influenced by the Ayodhic style? Or vice versa?

Today, there are more than 60 lakh people in South Korea who claim their ancestry to the princess of Ayodhya. These are the people known as Kim and Huh communities in South Korea. Former president Kim Dae-jung and prime minister Kim Jong-pil were from the same lineage.

Hindu tradition and scriptures states that, this place & other places in Ayodhya were discovered, excavated & rebuilt by the king Vikramaaditya as it was during the tenure of Lord Rama. It is said that Lord Rama appeared in king Vikramaditya's dreams and showed him the very powerful & prosperous city of Ayodhya with all its glory and richness during his times. He then instructed the king to rebuild the city of Ayodhya as it was. King Vikramaditya expressed his inability to rebuild such a magnificent city again with all its riches but promised to rebuild this city as per his abilities. He then, as per the lords instructions, carried out large scale archeological excavations, at different locations in Ayodhya and reinstalled the temples and other places of importance in Ayodhya. The city of Ayodhya holds immense historical and spiritual importance.

Historians have identified this place to be Saketa, a key Buddhist centre during the 5th century BC (it is a widely held belief that Buddha visited Ayodhya on several occasions) which it remained till the 5th century AD. In fact, Fa-hien, the Chinese monk, kept record of several Buddhist monasteries that he saw here.

In the 7th century AD, Xuan Zhang (Hiuen Tsang), the Chinese monk, recorded spotting many Hindu temples in Ayodhya. In the epic Ramayana, the city of Ayodhya is cited as the birthplace of Lord Sri Rama, a Hindu deity who was worshipped as Lord Vishnu's seventh incarnation. Ayodhya became a famous pilgrimage destination in the 1400s when Ramananda, the Hindu mystic, established a devotional sect of Rama.

The 16th century witnessed a shift in power with Ayodhya coming under the rule of the Mughal Empire. Ayodhya was annexed in 1856 by the British rulers. Between 1857 and 1859, this place was one of the main centers where the sparks of the first war of Indian Independence originated. These sparks later led to a nationwide revolt of the Indian soldiers in opposition to the British East India Company that began in Calcutta.

Amongst the 'MOKSHDAYANI PURIS' of the world meaning "the lands of spiritual bliss and liberation from the karma-bandhan" Ayodhya city holds the top spot, apart from cities like Varanasi, Dwaraka & others. Ramcharitmanas and other respectable Hindu scriptures like 'Vishnu Puran', 'Shrimad Bhagvat Mahapurana' & others emphasize the importance of living and visiting such religious places. According to them these spiritually charged cities increase the PUNYA meaning "fruits of virtuous and righteous actions" and PAAP meaning "fruits of a person's wrong doings" of an individual manifold. Therefore people visiting and living in such holy cities are found doing noble & virtuous deeds.

Naymi means the number 9. Tulsidas (The Author of the Ram-Charit- Manas- Ramayan), tells us that Shri Ram was born on this day. He goes on to state that he who sings Shri Ram's praise on this day, has all the Pilgrimage Centres come to his doorstep.

Shri Ram is connected with the number 9. The No 9 is the Highest number. After the number 9, comes the 0. Shri Morari Bapu tells us that in order to truly worship Shri Ram, either become complete like the number 9, or empty like the 0.

Also the Number 9, if you multiply it with any number, and total the sum, it will always be 9.

First Example: $3 \times 9 = 27$, $2 + 7 = 9$

Second Example: $9 \times 11 = 99$, $9 + 9 = 18$, $8 + 1 = 9$. TRY IT WITH ANY NUMBER, and Multiply by 9, and you will get the same result. Therefore, it is also said that the perfect time to remember Lord Ram, is either at 9 AM or 9 PM.

Vandalization by Muslim Invaders

Ayodhya, like other Indian cities, was the victim of pillage and sacking during the Ghaznavi raids and Ghori invasions. Hindu temples were allegedly looted or destroyed. The cultural fabric was totally destroyed. With Muslim rulers established around the city under Mohammed of Ghor, it lost its strategic and economic importance to

Lucknow and Kanpur. Ayodhya today is a small, rustic city with ancient Hindu architecture predominating, and with some Mughal influence. Its population is mostly Hindu with a minority of Muslims, Jains and Buddhists. However, its history and heritage hold an unequivocal importance for Hindus.

Accounts during the Muslim Invaders

The Encyclopedia Britannica volume 1, 1985. 15th edition, has this to say about Ayodhya:

"There are few monuments of any antiquity. Rama's birthplace is marked by a mosque, erected by the Moghul emperor Babur in 1528 on the site of an earlier temple." Until recently, much of the evidence was literary, based on accounts in chronicles, supplemented by some archaeology around the site. Even then, archaeology left little doubt regarding the existence of a previous temple at the site at which the Babri Masjid is situated. Ayodhya has drawn the attention of competent archaeologists including a few internationally known experts like B.B. Lal and S.P. Gupta. As a result, the volume of data available is huge running into several volumes. Some of it has probably been rendered obsolete by discoveries following the demolition of December 6, 1992.

Discoveries at the site

From 1975 through 1980, the Archaeological Survey of India under the Directorship of Professor B.B. Lal, a former Director General of the Survey, undertook an extensive programme of excavation at Ayodhya, including the very mound of the Ramajanamabhumis on which the so-called "Janmasthan Masjid" or Babri Mosque once stood and was later demolished on 6th December 1992. To continue with Gupta's account:

At Ayodhya, Professor Lal took as many as 14 trenches at different places to ascertain the antiquity of the site. It was then found that the history of the township was at least three thousand years old, if not more. When seen in the light of 20 black stone pillars, 16 of which were found re-used and standing in position as corner stones of piers for the disputed domed structure of the 'mosque', Prof. Lal felt that the pillar bases may have belonged to a Hindu temple built on archaeological levels formed prior to 13th century AD

On further stratigraphic and other evidence, Lal concluded that the pillar bases must have belonged to a Hindu temple that stood between 12th and the 16th centuries. "He also found a door-jamb carved with Hindu icons and decorative motifs of yakshas, yakshis, kirtimukhas, purnaghattas, double lotus flowers etc."

What this means is that Lal had found evidence for possibly two temples, one that existed before the 13th century, and another between the 13th and the 16th centuries. This corresponds very well indeed with history and tradition. We know that this area was ravaged by Muslim invaders following Muhammad of Ghor's defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan in the second battle of Tarain in 1192 AD. This was apparently rebuilt and remained in use until destroyed again in the 16th century by Babar. Impressive as these discoveries are, Lal had actually been somewhat unlucky. He

had barely missed striking a trench containing a treasure trove of Hindu artifacts from the medieval period. As Gupta tells us:

Prof. Lal had hard luck at Ramajamabhum. His southern trenches missed a huge pit with 40 and odd sculptures just by 10 to 12 feet. But he did get the pillar bases of the pre-16th century demolished-temple which others did not get.

Excavation was resumed on July 2, 1992 by S.P. Gupta, Y.D. Sharma, K.M. Srivastava and other senior archaeologists. This was less than six months before the demolition (which of course no one then knew was going to take place). Their particular interest lay in the forty-odd Hindu artifacts that had been discovered in the pit missed by Lal. These finds had been widely reported in the newspapers. Gupta, a former Director of the Allahabad Museum and an expert on medieval artifacts had a special interest in examining the finds. He tells us:

The team found that the objects were datable to the period ranging from the 10th through the 12th century AD, i.e., the period of the late Pratiharas and early Gahadvals. The kings of these two dynasties hailing from Kannauj had ruled over Avadh and eastern Uttar Pradesh successively during that period.

These objects included a number of amakalas, i.e., the cogged-wheel type architectural element which crown the bhumi shikharas or spires of subsidiary shrines, as well as the top of the spire or the main shikhara ... This is a characteristic feature of all north Indian temples of the early medieval period and no one can miss it - it is there in the Orissa temples such as Konarak, in the temples of Madhya Pradesh such as Khajuraho and in the temples of Rajasthan such as Osian.

There was other evidence — of cornices, pillar capitals, mouldings, door jambs with floral patterns and others — leaving little doubt regarding the existence of a 10th - 12th century temple complex at the site of Ayodhya. So Lal had been right in believing there was an earlier temple - prior to the one destroyed by Babar. More discoveries were made following the demolition of December 6. All these discoveries leave no doubt at all about the true picture.

The discovery of a number of Kushana period terracotta images of gods and goddesses earlier made it clear, first, that at the Janmabhum site Hindu temples were built several times during the 2000 years with the interval of only 450 years, from 1528 to 1992, when the Muslims destroyed the temple and occupied the site and also built a new structure they called 'Janmabhum Masjid' in their own record; And finally, the temple was destroyed sometime after the 13th century AD, in every likelihood in the early 16th century, as is fully borne out by the inscriptions of Mir Baqi found fixed in the disputed structure from back in time, during the British days as is clear from the accounts given by Mrs. A. Beveridge in her translation of Babur-Nama published in 1926. (op. cit. 115)

Discoveries at the site II: The Hari-Vishnu inscription

The demolition on December 6, 1992 changed the picture dramatically, providing further support to the traditional accounts — both Hindu and Muslim. Some of the kar-sevaks, no doubt influenced by all the publicity about history

and archaeology, went on to pick up more than two hundred pieces of stone slabs with writing upon them. These proved to belong to extremely important inscriptions, more than a thousand years old. In effect, the kar-sevaks had done what archaeologists should have done years ago; they had unearthed important inscriptions — in howsoever a crude form — something that should have been done years ago by professional historians and archaeologists. The inscriptions, even the few that have been read so far, shed a great deal of light on the history of not only Ayodhya and its environs, but all of North India in the early Medieval, and even the late ancient period.

Here is what S.P. Gupta found upon examining the two-hundred and fifty or so stone pieces with writing upon them:

Not all were ancient, since scores of them, generally rectangular marble tiles, bore the dedicatory inscriptions in the Devanagari script of the 20th century. However, at least three dozens of them were certainly ancient, belonging to the period bracketed between 10th and 12th centuries AD. (In The Ayodhya Reference: pp 117-18)

The most important of these deciphered so far is the Hari-Vishnu inscription that clinches the whole issue of the temple. It is written in 12th century AD Devanagari script and belongs therefore to the period before the onslaught of the Ghorids (1192 AD and later). Gupta tells us:

This inscription, running in as many as 20 lines, is found engraved on a 5 ft. long, 2 ft. broad and 2.5 inches thick slab of buff sandstone, apparently a very heavy tablet ... Three-fourths of the tablet is found obliterated anciently. The last line is also not complete since it was anciently subjected to chipping off. A portion of the central part is found battered, maybe someone tried to deface it anciently. The patination — tarnishing including wearout — is, however, uniform all over the surface, even in areas where once there were inscriptions. (op. cit. pp 118-19)

Gupta is an archaeologist and not an epigraphist trained to read ancient inscriptions. It was examined by Ajay Mitra Shastri, Chairman of the Epigraphical Society of India. Shastri gave the following summary. What the inscription tells us is of monumental significance to the history of Medieval India. The inscription is composed in high-flown Sanskrit verse, except for a very small portion in prose, and is engraved in chaste and classical Nagari script of the eleventh-twelfth century AD. It has yet to be fully deciphered, but the portions which have been fully deciphered and read are of great historical significance and value ... It was evidently put up on the wall of the temple, the construction of which is recorded in the text inscribed on it. Line 15 of this inscription, for example, clearly tells us that a beautiful temple of Vishnu-Hari, built with heaps of stones ... , and beautified with a golden spire ... unparalleled by any other temple built by earlier kings ... This wonderful temple ... was built in the temple-city of Ayodhya situated in Saketamandala. ... Line 19 describes god Vishnu as destroying king Bali ... and the ten headed personage (Dashanana, i.e., Ravana). (op. cit. 119; emphasis mine. I have left out the original Sanskrit quotes given by Shastri.)

Need one say more — a temple for Hari-Vishnu who killed the ten-headed Ravana, in the temple city of Ayodhya? So Ayodhya was known as a temple city even then; Saketa was the ancient name of the district. The inscription

confirms what archaeologists Lal and Gupta had earlier found about the existence of a temple complex. Shastri also tells us:

Line 20 contains an allusion to the serious threat from the west (paschatya-bhiti), apparently posed by Sultan Subuktugin and his son Mahmud of Ghazni, and its destruction by the king. " This, as I earlier pointed out, is echoed in some of the Puranas also.

This last fact is interesting — that Subuktugin and Mahmud Ghaznavi were stopped by an eastern ruler, the one who had the inscription made, probably Sallakshana known also as Sallakshanavarman. This shows there is probably a great deal more that remains to be discovered by archaeologists and historians. Summary of findings based on both literary and archaeological/epigraphical evidence:

1. All the literary sources without exception, are unanimous that a Rama temple existed at the site known since time immemorial as Rama Janmabhumi.
2. Archaeology confirms the existence of temples going back to Kushan times, or about 2000 years. This date may well be extended by future excavations assuming that such excavations will be permitted by politicians.
3. Archaeology records at least two destructions: the first in the 12th-13th century; the second, later, in all probability in the 16th. This agrees well with history and tradition that were temple destructions following the Ghori invasions (after 1192 AD) and restored, and was destroyed again in 1528 by Babar who replaced it with a mosque. This is the famous - or infamous - Babri Masjid that was demolished by kar-sevaks on December 6, 1992.
4. A large inscription discovered at the site dating to 11th-12th century records the existence of numerous temples including a magnificent one in which Hari-Vishnu was honored as destroyer of the ten-headed Ravana. Ayodhya was always known as a temple city. If Ayodhya was a temple city then the following holds true for the architectural synthesis of Ayodhya.

Hindu temple architecture reflects a synthesis of arts, the ideals of dharma, beliefs, values and the way of life cherished under Hinduism. The temple is a place for *Tirtha* - pilgrimage. All the cosmic elements that create and celebrate life in Hindu pantheon, are present in a Hindu temple - from fire to water, from images of nature to deities, from the feminine to the masculine, from kama to artha, from the fleeting sounds and incense smells to Purusha - the eternal nothingness yet universality - is part of a Hindu temple architecture. The form and meanings of architectural elements in a Hindu temple are designed to function as the place where it is the link between man and the divine, to help his progress to spiritual knowledge and truth, his liberation it calls moksha

The architectural principles of Hindu temples in India are described in Shilpa Shastras and Vastu Sastras. The Hindu culture has encouraged aesthetic independence to its temple builders, and its architects have sometimes exercised

considerable flexibility in creative expression by adopting other perfect geometries and mathematical principles in *Mandir* construction to express the Hindu way of life.

Hindu temple architecture as the main form of Hindu architecture has many varieties of style, though the basic nature of the Hindu temple remains the same, with the essential feature an inner sanctum, the *garbha griha* or womb-chamber, where the primary *Murti* or the image of a deity is housed in a simple bare cell. Around this chamber there are often other structures and buildings, in the largest cases covering several acres. On the exterior, the *garbhagriha* is crowned by a tower-like *shikhara*, also called the *vimana* in the south and Meru tower in Balinese temple. The shrine building often includes an ambulatory for *parikrama*(circumambulation), a mandapa congregation hall, and sometimes an antarala antechamber and porch between *garbhagriha* and mandapa. There may further mandapas or other buildings, connected or detached, in large temples, together with other small temples in the compound. The interpretation of Ayodhyas architecture can only be canvassed by a reflection onto mythology.

Architectural mythology means the symbolism of real-world architecture, as well as architecture described in mythological stories. In addition to language, a myth could be represented by a painting, a sculpture or a building.

It is about the overall story of an architectural work, often revealed through art. Not all stories surrounding an architectural work incorporate a level of myth. These stories can also be well hidden to the casual viewer and are often built into the conceptual design of the architectural statement.

Asserting that a word is not a naive and neutral utterance, but a value saturated tool, this paper delves into the meaning of "myth" in contemporary architectural writing and presents three major interpretations:

- (a) an error of belief;
- (b) a cultural given, a cosmology or symbolic fable handed down from primordial time;
- (c) a contemporary narrative which legitimately influences architectural design.

Each category then includes subdivisions according to its own nature. The vitality and importance of the third category of architectural myths (C) concerns not only analogy and inspiration by mythological content and structure, but also the application of mythical intentionality to the design process as close to the poetic imagination described.¹ Architecture is a spacio-physical manifestation of shared values in which form is a physical entity frozen in time and place, while space is notional phenomenon, infinite and timeless. Relying on essence and experience rather than geometry and shape, true architecture rises beyond form, transcending time and space.

According to historians the temple was built around 11centuary AD by the ruler Govindachandra of the Garhwal dynasty during his reign. The present-day city is identified as the location of Saketa, which was an important city of the Kosala mahajanapada in the first millennium BCE, and later served as its capital. The early Buddhist and Jain

canonical texts mention that the religious leaders Gautama Buddha and Mahavira visited and lived in the city. The Jain texts also describe it as the birthplace of five Tirthankaras namely, Rishabhanatha, Ajitanatha, Abhinandanana, Sumatinath and Anantnath, and associate it with the legendary chakravartins. From the Gupta period onwards, several sources mention Ayodhya and Saketa as the name of the same city.

The earliest of the Buddhist Pali-language texts and the Jain Prakrit-language texts mention a city called Saketa (Sageya or Saeya in Prakrit) as an important city of the Kosala mahajanapada. Topographical indications in both Buddhist and Jain texts suggest that Saketa is same as the present-day Ayodhya. For example, according to the *Samyutta Nikaya* and the *Vinaya Pitaka*, Saketa was located at a distance of six *yojanas* from Shravasti. The *Vinaya Pitaka* mentions that a big river was located between the two cities, and the *Sutta Nipata* mentions Saketa as the first halting place on the southward road from Shravasti to Pratishtana.

Ancient Sanskrit-language epics, such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* mention a legendary city called Ayodhya, which was the capital of the legendary Ikshvaku kings of Kosala, including Rama. Neither these texts, nor the earlier Sanskrit texts such as the Vedas, mention a city called Saketa. Non-religious, non-legendary ancient Sanskrit texts, such as Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* and Patanjali's commentary on it, do mention Saketa.^[11] The later Buddhist text *Mahavastu* describes Saketa as the seat of the Ikshvaku king Sujata, whose descendants established the Shakya capital Kapilavastu.

Fourth century onwards, multiple texts, including Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha*, mention Ayodhya as another name for Saketa. The later Jain canonical text *Jambudvīpa-Pannati* describes a city called Viniya (or Vinita) as the birthplace of Lord Rishabhanatha, and associates this city with Bharata Chakravartin; the *Kalpa-Sutra* describes Ikshvagabhumī as the birthplace of Rishabhadev. The index on the Jain text *Paumachariya* clarifies that Aojjha (Aodhya), Kosalapuri ("Kosala city"), Viniya, and Saeya (Saketa) are synonyms. The post-Canonical Jain texts also mention "Aojjha"; for example, the *Avassagacurni* describes it as the principal city of Kosala, while the *Avassaganijjuttī* names it as the capital of Sagara Chakravartin. The *Avassaganijjuttī* implies that that Viniya ("Vinia"), Kosalapuri ("Kosalapura"), and Ikshvagabhumī were distinct cities, naming them as the capitals of Abhinandana, Sumai, and Usabha respectively. Abhayadeva's commentary on the *Thana Sutta*, another post-canonical text, identifies Saketa, Ayodhya and Vinita as one city.

According to one theory, the legendary Ayodhya city is same as the historical city of Saketa and the present-day Ayodhya. According to another theory, the legendary Ayodhya is a mythical city, and the name "Ayodhya" came to be used for the Saketa (present-day Ayodhya) only around the fourth century, when a Gupta emperor (probably Skandagupta) moved his capital to Saketa, and renamed it to Ayodhya after the legendary city. Alternative, but less likely, theories state that Saketa and Ayodhya were two adjoining cities, or that Ayodhya was a locality within the Saketa city.

As Saketa

"Saketa" is the older name for the city, attested in Buddhist, Jain, Sanskrit, Greek and Chinese sources. According to Vaman Shivram Apte, the word "Saketa" is derived from the Sanskrit words *Saha* (with) and *Aketen* (houses or buildings). The *Adi Purana* states that Ayodhya is called Saketa "because of its magnificent buildings which had significant banners as their arms". According to Hans T. Bakker, the word may be derived from the roots *sa* and *ketu* ("with banner"); the variant name *saketu* is attested in the *Vishnu Purana*.

Ayodhya was stated to be the capital of the ancient Kosala kingdom in the *Ramayana*. Hence it was also referred to as "Kosala". The *Adi Purana* states that Ayodhya is famous as *su-kośala* "because of its prosperity and good skill".

The cities of Ayutthaya (Thailand), and Yogyakarta (Indonesia), are named after Ayodhya.

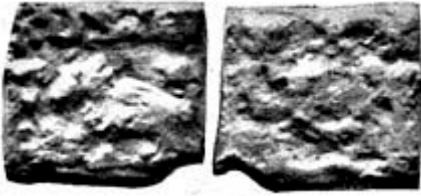
Archaeological and literary evidence suggests that the site of present-day Ayodhya had developed into an urban settlement by the 5th or 6th century BCE. The site is identified as the location of the ancient Saketa city, which probably emerged as a marketplace located at the junction of the two important roads, the Shravasti-Pratishthana north-south road, and the Rajagriha-Varanasi-Shravasti-Taxila east-west road. Ancient Buddhist texts, such as *Samyutta Nikaya*, state that Saketa was located in the Kosala kingdom ruled by Prasenajit (or Pasenadi; c. 6th-5th century BCE), whose capital was located at Shravasti. The later Buddhist commentary *Dhammapadam* states that the Saketa town was established by merchant Dhananjaya (the father of Visakha), on the suggestion of king Prasenajit. The *Digha Nikaya* describes it as one of the six large cities of India. The early Buddhist canonical texts mention Shravasti as the capital of Kosala, but the later texts, such as the Jain texts *Nayadhammakahao* and *Pannavana Suttam*, and the Buddhist Jatakas, mention Saketa as the capital of Kosala.

As a busy town frequented by travelers, it appears to have become important for preachers such as Gautama Buddha and Mahavira. The *Samyutta Nikaya* and *Anguttara Nikaya* mention that Buddha resided at Saketa at times.^[10] The early Jain canonical texts (such as *Antagada-dasao*, *Anuttarovavaiya-dasao*, and *Vivagasuya*) state that Mahavira visited Saketa; *Nayadhammakahao* states that Parshvanatha also visited Saketa.^[13] The Jain texts, both canonical and post-canonical, describe Ayodhya as the location of various shrines, such as those of snake, yaksha Pasamiya, Muni Suvratasvamin, and Surappia.

It is not clear what happened to Saketa after Kosala was conquered by the Magadha emperor Ajatashatru around 5th century BCE. There is lack of historical sources about the city's situation for the next few centuries: it is possible that the city remained a commercial centre of secondary importance, but did not grow into a political centre of Magadha, whose capital was located at Pataliputra. Several Buddhist buildings may have been constructed in the town during the rule of the Maurya emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE: these buildings were probably located on the present-day man-made mounds in Ayodhya. Excavations at Ayodhya have resulted in the discovery of a large brick wall, identified as a fortification wall by archaeologist B. B. Lal. This wall probably erected in the last quarter of the 3rd century BCE



The Dhanadeva-Ayodhya inscription, 1st century BCE.



Coin of ruler Muladeva, of the Deva dynasty minted in Ayodhya, Kosala. Obv: *Muladevasa*, elephant to left facing symbol. Rev: Wreath, above symbol, below snake.

After the decline of the Maurya empire, Saketa appears to have come under the rule of Pushyamitra Shunga. The 1st century BCE inscription of Dhanadeva suggests that he appointed a governor there. The *Yuga Purana* mentions Saketa as the residence of a governor, and describes it as being attacked by a combined force of Greeks, Mathuras, and Panchalas. Patanjali's commentary on Panini also refers to the Greek siege of Saketa.

Later, Saketa appears to have become part of a small, independent kingdom. The *Yuga Purana* states that Saketa was ruled by seven powerful kings after the retreat of the Greeks. The *Vayu Purana* and the *Brahmanda Purana* also state that seven powerful kings ruled in the capital of Kosala. The historicity of these kings is attested by the discovery of the coins of the Deva dynasty kings, including Dhanadeva, whose inscription describes him as the king of Kosala (*Kosaladhipati*). As the capital of Kosala, Saketa probably eclipsed Shravasti in importance during this period. The east-west route connecting Pataliputra to Taxila, which earlier passed through Saketa and Shravasti, appears to have shifted southwards during this period, now passing through Saketa, Ahichhatra and Kanyakubja.

After the Deva kings, Saketa appears to have been ruled by the Datta, Kushan, and Mitra kings, although the chronological order of their rule is uncertain. Bakker theorizes that the Dattas succeeded the Deva kings in the mid-1st century CE, and their kingdom was annexed to the Kushan Empire by Kanishka. The Tibetan text *Annals of Li Country* (c. 11th century) mentions that an alliance of king Vijayakirti of Khotan, king Kanika, the king of Gu-zan, and the king of Li, marched to India and captured the So-ke-d city. During this invasion, Vijayakirti took several Buddhist relics from Saketa, and placed them in the stupa of Phru-no. If Kanika is identified as Kanishka, and So-ke-d as Saketa, it appears that the invasion of Kushans and their allies led to the destruction of the Buddhist sites at Saketa.

Nevertheless, Saketa appears to have remained a prosperous town during the Kushan rule. The 2nd century geographer Ptolemy mentions a metropolis "Sageda" or "Sagoda", which has been identified with Saketa. The earliest inscription that mentions Saketa as a place name is dated to the late Kushan period: it was found on the pedestal of a Buddha image in Shravasti, and records the gift of the image by Sihadeva of Saketa. Before or after the Kushans, Saketa appears to have been ruled by a dynasty of kings whose names end in "-mitra", and whose coins have been found at Ayodhya. They may have been members of a local dynasty that was distinct from the Mitra dynasty of Mathura. These kings are attested only by their coinage: Sangha-mitra, Vijaya-mitra, Satya-mitra, Deva-mitra, and Arya-mitra; coins of Kumuda-sena and Aja-varman have also been discovered.

Gupta period

Around the 4th century, the region came under the control of the Guptas, who revived Brahmanism. The *Vayu Purana* and the *Brahmanda Purana* attest that the early Gupta kings ruled Saketa. No Gupta-era archaeological layers have been discovered in present-day Ayodhya, although a large number of Gupta coins have been discovered here. It is possible that during the Gupta period, the habitations in the city were located in the areas that have not yet been excavated. The Buddhist sites that had suffered destruction during the Khotanese-Kushan invasion appear to have remained deserted. The 5th century Chinese traveler Faxian states that the ruins of Buddhist buildings existed at "Sha-chi" during his time. One theory identifies Sha-chi with Saketa, although this identification is not undisputed. If Sha-chi is indeed Saketa, it appears that by the 5th century, the town no longer had a flourishing Buddhist community or any important Buddhist building that was still in use.

An important development during the Gupta time was the recognition of Saketa as the legendary city of Ayodhya, the capital of the Ikshvaku dynasty. The 436 CE Karamdanda (Karmdand) inscription, issued during the reign of Kumaragupta I, names Ayodhya as the capital of the Kosala province, and records commander Prithvisena's offerings to Brahmins from Ayodhya. Later, the capital of the Gupta Empire was moved from Pataliputra to Ayodhya. Paramartha states that king Vikramaditya moved the royal court to Ayodhya; Xuanzang also corroborates this, stating that this king moved the court to the "country of Shrivasthi", that is, Kosala. A local oral tradition of Ayodhya, first recorded in writing by Robert Montgomery Martin in 1838 mentions that the city was deserted after the death of Rama's descendant Brihadbala. The city remain deserted until King Vikrama of Ujjain came searching for it, and re-established it. He cut down the forests that had covered the ancient ruins, erected the Ramgarh fort, and built 360 temples.

Vikramaditya was a title of multiple Gupta kings, and the king who moved the capital to Ayodhya is identified as Skandagupta. Bakker theorizes that the move to Ayodhya may have been prompted by a flooding of the river Ganges at Pataliputra, the need to check the Hunan advance from the west, and Skandagupta's desire to compare himself with Rama (whose Ikshvaku dynasty is associated with the legendary Ayodhya). According to Paramartha's *Life of Vasubandhu*, Vikramaditya was a patron of scholars, and awarded 300,000 pieces of gold to Vasubandhu.^[40] The text states that Vasubandhu was a native of Saketa ("Sha-ki-ta"), and describes Vikramaditya as the king of Ayodhya ("A-yu-ja"). This wealth was used to build three monasteries in the country of A-yu-ja (Ayodhya). Paramartha further states that the later king Baladitya (identified with Narasimhagupta) and his mother also awarded large sums of gold to Vasubandhu, and these funds were used to build another Buddhist temple at Ayodhya. These structures may have been seen by the 7th century Chinese traveler Xuanzang, who describes a stupa and a monastery at Ayodhya ("O-yu-t-o").

Ayodhya probably suffered when the Hunas led by Mihirakula invaded the Gupta empire in the 6th century. After the fall of the Guptas, it may have been ruled by the Maukhari dynasty, whose coins have been found in the nearby areas. It was not devastated, as the 7th century Chinese traveler Xuanzang describes it as a flourishing town and a Buddhist centre. However, it had lost its position as an important political centre to Kanyakubja (Kannauj). At the time of Xuanzang's visit, it was a part of Harsha's empire, and was probably the seat of a vassal or an administrative

officer. Xuanzang states that the city measured about 0.6 km (20 li) in circumference. Another 7th century source, *Kāśikāvṛtti*, mentions that the town was surrounded by a moat similar to that around Pataliputra.^[46]

After the fall of Harsha's empire, Ayodhya appears to have been variously controlled by local kings and the rulers of Kannauj, including Yashovarman and the Gurjara-Pratiharas. The town is not mentioned in any surviving texts or inscriptions composed during 650-1050 CE, although it may be identified with the "city of Harishchandra" mentioned in the 8th century poem *Gaudavaho*. Archaeological evidence (including images to Vishnu, Jain tirthankaras, Ganesha, the seven Matrikas, and a Buddhist stupa) suggests that the religious activity in the area continued during this period.

Early medieval period

According to Indologist Hans T. Bakker, the only religious significance of Ayodhya in the first millennium CE was related to the *Gopratara* tirtha (now called Guptar Ghat), where Rama and his followers are said to have ascended to heaven by entering the waters of Sarayu.

In the 11th century, the Gahadavala dynasty came to power in the region, and promoted Vaishnavism. They built several Vishnu temples in Ayodhya, five of which survived till the end of Aurangzeb's reign. Hans Bakker concludes that there might have been a temple at the supposed birth spot of Rama built by the Gahadavalas (see Vishnu Hari inscription). In subsequent years, the cult of Rama developed within Vaishnavism, with Rama being regarded as the foremost avatar of Vishnu. Consequently, Ayodhya's importance as a pilgrimage centre grew.

In 1226 CE, Ayodhya became the capital of the province of Awadh (or "Oudh") within the Delhi sultanate. Muslim historians state that the area was little more than wilderness prior to this. Pilgrimage was tolerated, but the tax on pilgrims ensured that the temples did not receive much income.

Mughal and British period



Ayodhya in 1785 as seen from river Ghaghara; painting by William Hodges

Under Mughal rule, the Babri mosque was constructed in Ayodhya. The city was the capital of the province of Awadh, which is also believed to be a variant of the name "Ayodhya." During the British Raj the city was known as Ajodhya or Ajodhia and was part of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. It was also the seat of a small 'talukdari' state.

After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 CE, the central Muslim rule weakened, and Awadh became virtually independent, with Ayodhya as its capital. However, the rulers became increasingly dependent on the local Hindu nobles, and control over the temples and pilgrimage centres was relaxed. Saadat Ali Khan, Nawab of Awadh, bestowed the *riyasat* (principality) of Ayodhya on his loyal Brahmin soldier Dwijdeo Mishra of the Kasyapa gotra, for quelling revenue rebels in Mehendauna in Eastern UP.

The Indonesian sultanate of Yogyakarta, were named after Ayodhya, reflecting the common Southeast Asian practice of adopting place names from Hindu kingdoms. Yogyakarta is named after the Indian city of Ayodhya, the birthplace of the eponymous hero Rama from the *Ramayana* epic. *Yogya* means "suitable, fit, proper", and *karta* means "prosperous, flourishing"—thus, "a city that is fit to prosper". According to the Canggal inscription dated 732 CE, the area traditionally known as "Mataram" became the capital of the Medang Kingdom, identified as *Mdang i Bhumi Mataram* established by King Sanjaya of Mataram. The inscription was found in a Hindu temple in Central Java, 40 km away from Yogyakarta and 20 km away from the giant Borobudur temple complex. This Hindu temple itself was on the border between the area of the Hindu Sañjaya dynasty and the area of the Buddhist Shailendra dynasty. Mataram became the center of a refined and sophisticated Javanese Hindu-Buddhist culture for about three centuries in the heartland of the Progo River valley, on the southern slopes of Mount Merapi volcano. This time period witnessed the construction of numerous *candi*, including Borobudur and Prambanan.

Around the year 929 CE, the last ruler of the Sañjaya dynasty, King Mpu Sindok of Mataram, moved the seat of power of the Mataram Kingdom from Central Java to East Java and thus established the Isyana dynasty. The exact cause of the move is still uncertain; however, a severe eruption from Mount Merapi or a power struggle with the Sumatra-based Srivijaya kingdom probably caused the move. Historians suggest that some time during the reign of King Wawa of Mataram (924–929 CE), Merapi erupted and devastated the kingdom's capital in Mataram.

It is quite possible that not only the name but also the design of Ayodhya may have inspired the builders of

Well-known from contemporary sources and maps, Ayutthaya was laid out according to a systematic and rigid city planning grid, consisting of roads, canals, and moats around all the principal structures. The scheme took maximum advantage of the city's position in the midst of three rivers and had a hydraulic system for water management which was technologically extremely advanced and unique in the world.

The city was ideally situated at the head of the Gulf of Siam, equi-distant between India and China and well upstream to be protected from Arab and European powers who were expanding their influence in the region even as

Ayutthaya was itself consolidating and extending its own power to fill the vacuum left by the fall of Angkor. As a result, Ayutthaya became a center of economics and trade at the regional and global levels, and an important connecting point between the East and the West. The Royal Court of Ayutthaya exchanged ambassadors far and wide, including with the French Court at Versailles and the Mughal Court in Delhi, as well as with imperial courts of Japan and China. Foreigners served in the employ of the government and also lived in the city as private individuals. Downstream from the Ayutthaya Royal Palace there were enclaves of foreign traders and missionaries, each building in their own architectural style. Foreign influences were many in the city and can still be seen in the surviving art and in the architectural ruins. Could it be that this city so far away from our Ayodhya bears resemblance to the mythical architecture of Ayodhya of Ram. It could be. If the name itself was copied the architecture, style, town plan, etc could all have inspired the then Indonesian Hindus to plan another Ayodhya. This one at least is still standing much as Angkor Wat. "Myths often seek to make us feel more connected to sacred origins." ³ Let us hope that we can see Ayodhya's architecture in our mythical dreams and get content over our discoveries.

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